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Paper 10

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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

ON PETITION

In re Patent No. 5,800,239
Issue Date: September 1, 1998
Application No. 08/752,002
Filed: November 15, 1996
Title of Invention: **BUILDING BLOCK TOY**
SET

This is a decision on the petition filed June 21, 2010, under 37 CFR 1.378(b), to accept the delayed payment of the maintenance fee for the above-identified patent.

The petition is **DISMISSED**.

If reconsideration of this decision is desired, a petition for reconsideration under 37 CFR 1.378(e) must be filed within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. No extension of this 2-month time limit can be granted under 37 CFR 1.136(a) or (b). Any such petition for reconsideration must be accompanied by the petition fee of \$400.00 as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(h). The petition for reconsideration should include an exhaustive attempt to provide the lacking item(s) noted below, since, after a decision on the petition for reconsideration, no further reconsideration or review of the matter will be undertaken by the Commissioner.

The patent issued on September 1, 1998. The second maintenance fee due could have been paid during the period from September 1, 2005 to March 1, 2006 or, with a surcharge during the period from March 2, 2006 to September 1, 2006. Accordingly, this patent expired on September 1, 2006, for failure to timely remit the second maintenance fee.

A petition to accept the delayed maintenance fee under 35 U.S.C. § 41(c) and 37 CFR 1.378(b) must be accompanied by (1) an adequate, verified showing that the delay was unavoidable, since reasonable care was taken to ensure that the maintenance fee would be paid timely and that the petition was filed promptly after the patentee was notified of, or otherwise became aware of, the expiration of the patent, (2) payment of the appropriate maintenance fee, unless previously submitted, and (3) payment of the surcharge set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(l)(1).

This petition lacks item (1) above.

Petitioner, asserts that the delay was unavoidable because he did not receive notice of maintenance fees due and thus did not know of the requirement to pay a maintenance fee.

The Commissioner may accept late payment of the maintenance fee if the delay is shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner to have been "unavoidable".¹ A late maintenance fee is considered under the same standard as that for reviving an abandoned application under 35 U.S.C. § 133 because 35 U.S.C. § 41(c)(1) uses identical language (i.e. "unavoidable delay").² Decisions reviving abandoned applications have adopted the reasonably prudent person standard in determining if the delay was unavoidable.³ In this regard:

The word 'unavoidable' . . . is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business. It permits them in the exercise of this care to rely upon the ordinary and trustworthy agencies of mail and telegraph, worthy and reliable employees, and such other means and instrumentalities as are usually employed in such important business. If unexpectedly, or through the unforeseen fault or imperfection of these agencies and instrumentalities, there occurs a failure, it may properly be said to be unavoidable, all other conditions of promptness in its rectification being present.⁴

As 35 U.S.C. § 41(c) requires the payment of fees at specified intervals to maintain a patent in force, rather than some response to a specific action by the Office under 35 U.S.C. § 133, a reasonably prudent person in the exercise of due care and diligence would have taken steps to ensure the timely payment of such maintenance fees.⁵ That is, an adequate showing that the delay was "unavoidable" within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. § 41(c) and 37 CFR 1.378(b)(3) requires a showing of the steps taken to ensure the timely payment of the maintenance fees for this patent.⁶

The showing of record therefore has been considered, but petitioner's lack of knowledge

¹35 U.S.C. § 41(c)(1).

²Ray v. Lehman, 55 F.3d 606, 608-09, 34 USPQ2d 1786, 1787 (Fed. Cir. 1995) (quoting In re Patent No. 4,409,763, 7 USPQ2d 1798, 1800 (Comm'r Pat. 1989)).

³Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (Comm'r Pat. 1887)(the term "unavoidable" "is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business").

⁴In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (1912)(quoting Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)); see also Winkler v. Ladd, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 USPQ 666, 167-68 (D.D.C. 1963), aff'd, 143 USPQ 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (1913). In addition, decisions on revival are made on a "case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account." Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982). Finally, a petition cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing that the delay was "unavoidable." Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316-17, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1131-32 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

⁵Ray, 55 F.3d at 609, 34 USPQ2d at 1788.

⁶Id.

of the need to pay a maintenance fee does not rise to the level of unavoidable delay.⁷

Under the statutes and regulations, the lack of knowledge of the requirement to pay the maintenance is not unavoidable. The requirement to pay maintenance fees is printed on the face of the patent and even in the absence of being told or even reminded of the need to pay the maintenance fees to maintain the patent in full force and effect, if the patent owner had read the patent, he would have known of the maintenance fee requirements. Furthermore, under the statutes and regulations, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) has no duty to notify patentee of the requirement to pay maintenance fees or to notify patentee when the maintenance fee is due. It is solely the responsibility of the patentee to assure that the maintenance fee is paid timely to prevent expiration of the patent. The failure to receive a reminder notice and the lack of knowledge of the requirement to pay the maintenance fee will not shift the burden of monitoring the time for payment a maintenance fee from the patentee to the USPTO.

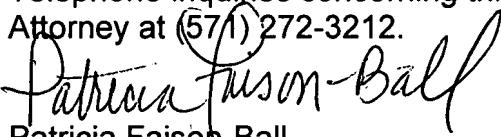
Finally, the address in the petition is different than the correspondence address of record in the file. A courtesy copy of this decision will be mailed to petitioner. All future correspondence, however, will be mailed solely to the correspondence address of record. If the change of correspondence address is to be filed by an assignee, the assignee must establish its right to take action in accordance with 37 CFR 3.73. If petitioner desires to receive future correspondence regarding any Maintenance Fee Reminder which may be mailed concerning this patent, a Fee Address should be submitted to Maintenance Fee Division.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

By mail: Mail Stop Petitions
Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria VA 22313-1450

By FAX: (571) 273-8300
Attn: Office of Petitions

Telephone inquiries concerning this matter may be directed to the undersigned Petitions Attorney at (571) 272-3212.


Patricia Faison-Ball
Senior Petitions Attorney
Office of Petitions

⁷See In Re Patent No. 4,409,763, 7 USPQ2d 1798 (Comm'r Pat. 1988), aff'd Rydeen v. Quigg, 748 F. Supp. 900, 16 USPQ2d 1876 (D.D.C. 1990); aff'd without opinion (Rule 36), 937 F.2d 623 (Fed. Cir. 1991), cert. denied, 60 U.S.L.W. 3520 (January 27, 1992). See also "Final Rules for Patent Maintenance Fees," 49 Fed. Reg. 34716, 34722-23 (Aug. 31, 1984).